

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A flexible endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft ~~inseparably~~ incorporating an image-carrying component or image guide ~~taken from the group consisting of a fiber-optic bundle and an electrical cable~~, said insertion shaft being formed with an outer surface having at least one longitudinally extending slotted channel having a first transverse dimension or diameter, said slotted channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface, said slot having a second transverse dimension or width, said second transverse dimension or width being smaller than said first transverse dimension or diameter, further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said insertion shaft being formed with a pair of opposing edges along said slot, ~~said closure member being removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges~~, said closure member being an elongate strip removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, ~~at least one of said closure member and said insertion shaft being provided with a groove, the other of said closure member and said insertion shaft being insertable into said groove to removably attach said closure member to said insertion shaft~~ said slotted channel having a substantially circular cross-section with a circumference, said closure member completing the circumference of the slotted channel by being substantially disposed along the circumference of said circular cross-section.

2. (canceled)

3. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel has a distal end opening and proximal end opening, said slot extending from said distal end opening to said proximal end opening, said closure member closing said slot while maintaining said distal end opening and said proximal end opening unobstructed.

4-9. (canceled)

10. (currently amended) A flexible video endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft ~~inseparably~~ incorporating [[an]] a video-image-carrying component ~~or image guide~~, said insertion shaft being formed along an outer surface with at least one longitudinally extending channel having a first transverse dimension or diameter, said channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface, said slot having a second transverse dimension or width, said second transverse dimension or width being smaller than said first transverse dimension or diameter, further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said insertion shaft being formed with a pair of opposing edges along said slot, said closure member being removably and slidably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, ~~said closure member being slidably connected to said insertion shaft, said closure member being provided with an entrainment element for facilitating manipulation of said closure member to slide said closure member along said slot, said entrainment member being a pull tab~~ said channel having a substantially circular cross-section, said

closure member being configured to not protrude into said channel and to substantially maintain said circular cross-section.

11. (canceled)

12. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1, further comprising a catheter disposed in said channel.

13. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 12 wherein said closure member is disposed over said channel and said catheter.

14. (canceled)

15. (canceled)

16. (canceled)

17. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein at a proximal end said channel terminates at an entry port bifurcated with respect to and diverging from said shaft, further comprising a biopsy channel liner removably disposed in said channel and extending at a proximal end out of said entry port, an end cap being fitted to said liner at said entry port.

18. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 17 wherein said entry port defines a closed lumen communicating with said channel.

19. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 17 wherein said channel continues open along said entry port.

20. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel extends from a proximal end portion of said insertion shaft to a distal tip thereof.

21. (canceled)

22. (withdrawn) A flexible endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft, said insertion shaft being formed with an outer surface having at least one longitudinally extending channel longitudinally traversable by an elongate endoscopic instrument, said channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface,

wherein said channel is one of a plurality of channels formed along said outer surface of said insertion shaft, said channels being circumferentially spaced from one another, each of said channels having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface,

further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close at least one of the slots, said closure member being a web member provided with an embedded tensile element for enabling a severing of said web member

in preparation for removal of said web member from said endoscope insertion member, said web member being a rectangular sheet provided in a region along a longitudinal edge with a layer of adhesive material to enable a fastening of said sheet to the endoscope insertion member upon a wrapping of the sheet completely about the endoscope insertion member.

23. (withdrawn) The endoscope defined in claim 1, further comprising a sheath disposed about said insertion shaft.

24. (withdrawn) An endoscope assembly comprising an elongate flexible endoscope insertion member provided with at least one channel along an outer cylindrical surface, said channel being open along said surface, said channel having a mostly circular cross-section divided by a slot, said channel being defined by a surface of said insertion member having a C-shaped cross-section with longitudinal edges defining said slot being turned in and extending towards one another, further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said closure member being a web member provided with an embedded tensile element for enabling a severing of said web member in preparation for removal of said web member from said endoscope insertion member, said web member being a rectangular sheet provided in a region along a longitudinal edge with a layer of adhesive material to enable a fastening of said sheet to the endoscope insertion member upon a wrapping of the sheet completely about the endoscope insertion member.

25. (canceled)

26. (canceled)

27. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 24, further comprising a catheter removably disposable in said channel.

28. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein said catheter is separate from and independent of said sheath.

29. (canceled)

30. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said closure member is slidably connected to said insertion shaft, said closure member being provided with an entrainment element for facilitating manipulation of said closure member to slide said closure member along said slot.

31. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 30, wherein said entrainment member is a pull tab.

32. (canceled)

33. (canceled)

34. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein at a proximal end said channel terminates at an entry port bifurcated with respect to and diverging from said insertion member, said catheter being extendable at a proximal end out of said entry port, an end cap being provided on said catheter.

35. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 34 wherein said entry port defines a closed lumen communicating with said channel.

36. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 34 wherein said channel continues open along said entry port.

37. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein said closure member is disposed over said channel and said catheter.

38. (canceled)

39. (canceled)

40. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein said catheter is provided at a proximal end with connectors for coupling said catheter to a source of irrigation fluid and a source of suction.

41. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 24 wherein said channel extends from a proximal end portion of said insertion shaft to a distal tip thereof.

42. (canceled)

43. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 24 wherein said channel is one of a pair of channels formed along said outer surface of said insertion shaft, said channels being circumferentially spaced from one another.

44. (canceled)

45. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said insertion shaft has a first outer surface and said closure member has a second outer surface, said second outer surface being smoothly continuous with said first outer surface.

46. (currently amended) The endoscope defined in claim 45 wherein said closure member is arcuate in transverse cross-section, completing the circumference of said insertion member.

47. (canceled)

48. (canceled)

49. (canceled)